

EXHIBIT NO. ~~Page 1 of 1~~ 9
DATE 2-20-09
BILL NO. SB 372

Rich Cowger

From: Rich Cowger [rcowger@columbusfirerescue.com]
Sent: Friday, February 20, 2009 8:50 AM
To: 'joebalyeat@yahoo.com'; 'vjack@centurytel.net'; 'gbarkus@gmail.com'; 'brown.roy@bresenan.net';
'jpranch@mtintouch.net'; 'donstein@midrivers.com'; 'joestro@q.com'; 'windyboy';
'apsaalookewomen@yahoo.com'
Subject: SB372

Committee Members,

Please accept this email as written testimony for my support of SB372.

My name is Rich Cowger.

I am the Fire Chief for Columbus Rural Fire District and the Town of Columbus. I was able to testify in person to you in regards to SB373 last Thursday and it was my desire to be in front of you again today but due to weather condition I am not able to make it.

At the hearing you heard from several members of the fire service that have been rejected from entering into the FURS retirement system because of not having been "appointed" to that position by their 35th birthday.

You also heard testimony from the Montana State Professional Firefighters union in opposition to the bill fearing that by opening up this age limit it could create a "Pandora's box" effect on an actuarially sound retirement system.

Since the last hearing, Chief Brett Waters, Chief Curt Belts and I took the opportunity to meet with members of the MSPFA to try to create a workable agreement to allow a level playing field for FURS enrollment. At that meeting, all there were in agreement that one of the most troublesome issues in regards to getting in the FURS system is what the definition of appointment is.

While not the absolute answer this bill before you today creates and opportunity for those employed by a rural fire district, who can pass a medical examination and be declared fit for duty by a medical doctor to be allowed in to the system and still maintains the 34 age limit for municipalities.

We feel this is a good start to making a system whole and complete for everyone that truly qualifies and that will allow us time to work on how we define the issue of appointment.

It is no ones intent to flood a system to failure. But I do believe that a qualified firefighter is a qualified firefighter regardless of the age of hire and if that firefighter can pass a medical exam supporting that them they should be allowed in. Many of Montana's fastest growing departments are rural fire districts. They need the support to be able to bring in go mature people to help build these organizations to continue to provide the best service possible to the same tax paying citizens of this state that help fund this retirement system.

Please support this bill.

Thank You.

Columbus City/Rural Fire Rescue
Rich Cowger

Chief
rcowger@columbusfirerescue.com
944 East Pike
PO Box 653
Columbus MT. 59019
tel: 406-322-4302 ☐
fax: 406-322-5202
mobile: 406-321-1180 ☐

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